



New Voices Series

No. 9, February 2011

Gender Violence as Insecurity: Research Trends in South Asia

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Srinivasan, A. (2011). *Gender Violence as Insecurity: Research Trends in South Asia*, New Voices Series, no. 9, February, Global Consortium on Security Transformation (GCST).

Available at: http://www.securitytransformation.org/gc_publications.php

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Gender Violence as Insecurity: Research Trends in South Asia

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1. Setting the Context

Across the world, gender violence is pervasive and persistent, cutting across divisions of class, caste, age and community.

Across the world, data on gender violence is inadequate; there are few research initiatives that monitor, track and analyze gender violence in a sustained manner.

These two statements, variations of which are common in most publications on gender violence or violence against women (VAW), represent a curious contradiction. We do not know enough about the incidence, causes, costs and consequences of gender violence; but we do know that it is highly prevalent in its many forms and manifestations and that it adversely impacts the lives of women and men across the world.

The objective of this paper is to identify and analyze the state of research on gender violence in South Asia. Without research to lend direction and suggest approaches, advocacy and activism run the risk of becoming ad hoc, however well-intentioned and well-executed. The nature, quality and accessibility of research make a tremendous difference to the service, advocacy and policy-making sectors that work on this issue.

1.1. Gender Violence in South Asia

Gender violence is endemic in this populous region, once described as 'the worst region in terms of indicators with the highest rates of different forms of violence against women' (Coormaswamy, 2005b). Patriarchy is deep-rooted in virtually every country in this region; far from being condemned, gender violence is tolerated, accepted, normalized and condoned. As Naved points out (UNFPA, no date), 'men in South Asia... seem to have tacit, if not outspoken, support from agents of the state, as well as from family members, to do what they want with females in their own families.' South Asia has the lowest sex ratio of women to men in the world, with 937 women to 1000 men in 2005 (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2007).

Gender violence manifests in numerous ways – as pre-natal sex selection and female foeticide, female infanticide, rape, forced marriage, early marriage, trafficking, dowry harassment, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, honour killings, public humiliation, street sexual harassment, cruelty to widows and elder abuse. Gender violence is neither static nor isolated, and is inexorably linked to the political climate, social conditions, new trends in society, advancements in technology, and access to education and health care, among other factors. In addition, many forms of violence are long-standing social, cultural and community practices - bride burning, early and child marriages and honour killings, among others. As Coomaraswamy contends, 'the vulnerability to violence at every stage of the life cycle makes VAW a terrible South Asian legacy' (2005b).

The impact of gender violence extends beyond that of a single incident, or series of incidents. Gender violence affects an individual's ability to go to school, to lead a healthy life (physically and mentally), to enter into a relationship with someone of her/his choice, to go out to work, to earn an income, to use public transport and to be financially independent. Violence means that girls may be deprived of food and become more malnourished than their brothers; that a girl may be withdrawn from school by her parents for fear of violence; that young women may be denied access to reproductive and maternal care; and most of all, that women may lead lives of fear, placing constraints upon their own mobility and that of other girls and women in the family.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap (2010) report draws attention to the potential impact violence has on indicators that measure the quality of life of an individual. The South Asian countries, with the singular exception of Sri Lanka, continue to rank embarrassingly low on the Global Gender Gap.

Tab. 1: Global Gender Gap Report 2010

Country	Rank (out of 134 countries)
Bangladesh	82
Bhutan	Not ranked
India	112
Maldives	99
Nepal	115
Pakistan	132
Sri Lanka	16

There are no indicators that directly measure the incidence of violence, except one that assesses the existence of legislation punishing acts of violence against women. However, the Gender Gap factors in economic participation and opportunity, access to education, health and vulnerability to disease and political empowerment; a corollary of poor performance on these variables is vulnerability, above all, to violence. For example, 'healthy life expectancy' estimates the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health, taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors.

Despite the prolonged impact and tragic consequences, gender violence remains invisible and shrouded in silence in every country in South Asia, often undetected even by well-meaning state agencies. Social change therefore depends on a groundswell of civil society support and activism, that in turn, is pervasive, sustained, based on reliable data, and involves multiple stakeholders.

1.2. Gender Violence as Insecurity

Traditionally, women have been absent in the discourse on security. For the longest time, the focus of security studies has been on military (armed) and national security, with little or no room for questions of human security, including the security of women. Conceptually, human security has expanded the boundaries of our understanding of security, to include 'security of income, employment, food, health, education and environment. It also includes insecurity arising from violence within the household, by the community, and, sometimes, even the state against women, children and the minorities. . . The ultimate concern of human security is with people's daily lives and the fear of their disruption by societal injustice or natural calamities' (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2005).

Feminist scholars have long argued (and continue to do so) that the security of women, in both private and public spaces, is integral to creating and sustaining security for any population. As has been pointed out, 'we need to ask whether security in a globalized world can be found with duct tape, bigger bombs and closed gates or requires addressing people's needs and rights'? (Bunch, 2004).

This paper posits and examines gender violence as an issue of insecurity, thereby also placing what is often considered a private concern firmly in the public domain. There is an irrefutable, logical argument for viewing gender violence as a credible security issue, one that threatens the quality of

life (and often life itself) of an overwhelmingly large number of people in any population. This is especially critical given that a woman is vulnerable to violence throughout her life, from before birth to old age.

Without securing women from things that threaten their survival and from the threat of violence, you can have no meaningful security studies or policy. A problem-solving, people-oriented, nuanced and holistic approach is what is required if the pursuit of security is to have meaning in the everyday lives of ordinary women — and men. (Rajagopalan, 2003)

What then is the role of the state in ensuring and guaranteeing the security of women? The growing body of evidence indicates that states continue to turn a blind eye to violence that affects women's lives, in both peace time and during war. There is also evidence to suggest that several states not only fail to protect the security of its citizens but also actively perpetuate violence against women during armed conflict.

The security of women during war time has been the subject of extensive research across the world, and particularly in countries with long-drawn out conflicts. Several scholars have reaffirmed the link between conflict and gender violence, pointing out that rape continues to be a potent weapon of war. Recent research in Sri Lanka, in India (particularly during the communal riots in the states of Gujarat and Orissa in the last decade), and in Bangladesh has validated this. Equally, in an ongoing conflict or post-conflict situation, it is the state's responsibility to protect displaced women, who are at greater risk of violence in resettlement areas or refugee camps.

Taking the argument one step further, we can contend that gender violence in peace time sets the tone for extended periods of violence, manifesting in disputes between individuals, communities, neighbourhoods, regions and countries, occasionally resulting in full-fledged war and militarism. Bunch (2004) argues that 'violence against women is part of what perpetuates war and conflict, what feeds acceptance of violence as an inevitable and normal means of dealing with differences and conflict. The climate of impunity for violence against women that exists at the core of most societies – the notion that men and boys have that they can get away with it - feeds the culture of impunity towards violence more generally.'

More positively, in South Asia, governments have been active in passing several crucial acts on various forms of violence faced by women, and several others are in the pipelines. There however remain issues with implementation of many of these legal provisions. Experience has shown that while policy and legislative change is critical, it must be accompanied by genuine participation by civil society. Citizens must help create and maintain safe spaces, both public and private. Combating violence against women requires a healthy partnership between the state and civil society groups, including women's organisations (Coomaraswamy, 2005b). How a society confronts the issue of violence against women goes to the heart of how women experience security.

1.3. About this Paper

This paper, Gender Violence as Insecurity: Research trends in South Asia, will explore several key issues, seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Is there sustained, consistent research on gender violence in South Asia?
2. Who commissions and carries out this research?

3. What has/does this research focus on?
4. What are the specific challenges that researchers working on this issue face? How can these be addressed?

The geographical scope of this paper is South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Thematically, this study will look to include all gender violence research initiatives; however, inevitably, violence against women will be a primary component. In fact, the very frames and categories used in creating datasets and research programmes are of interest to this paper.

The research process began with a review of the extensive literature on this issue, to inform the research and define key concepts. The next step was to identify and contact organizations that have worked and continue to work on issues of gender violence or violence against women. In-depth interviews were carried out, either in person, via email or on the phone, depending on the responsiveness and willingness of organisations and individuals to share their experiences. In addition, this researcher visited organisations with extensive archives and library collections on gender violence, including the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo and Centre for Women's Development Studies in New Delhi.

It must be stated clearly that this paper is not intended to serve as either a best practice analysis or an exhaustive mapping and documentation of organizations researching gender violence. Given the constraints of time and budget, it was not feasible to identify every single organization in all seven countries in the region. In addition, this researcher has also depended on the Internet to identify and contact organizations, thereby possibly excluding organizations without an online presence, particularly in Nepal and Bangladesh. Information found online often proved to be outdated – several phone numbers and email addresses were invalid. In several cases, organizations did not respond to this researcher's request for a phone or email interview.

Informal snowball sampling has partly served to negate this dependence on the Internet. This was particularly effective in both Colombo and New Delhi, where this researcher traveled to. However, in many other instances, organizations have professed to be unaware of another's existence or work, despite physical proximity.

The chapters to follow will present the key findings of this research project. This first chapter has briefly outlined gender violence in the region and posited gender violence as insecurity. Chapter 2 clarifies key definitions and discusses at length the challenges in researching gender violence. Given that the majority of this paper is based on a review of literature, there is no separate literature review section. Chapter 3 includes short sections on each country, discussing the state of research on gender violence. Chapter 4 summarizes the key findings and offers concluding reflections.

2. Researching Gender Violence: Scope and Challenges

2.1. Working Definitions

2.1.1. Gender violence

The terms gender violence, gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) are often used interchangeably. However, there is a clear distinction between the intended meanings of these terms.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines the term violence against women in Article 1 as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.'

This means that the term includes all forms of violence whether it takes place within the family, in public spaces, in and by communities or by the State and irrespective of whom the perpetrator is. The 1995 Beijing Declaration adopts the same definition and further expands it to include:

- violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy;
- forced sterilization, forced abortion, coerced or forced use of contraceptives;
- prenatal sex selection and female infanticide;
- the specific vulnerabilities of women from minority communities and groups, including the disabled, the displaced, elderly women, indigenous, women living in remote areas or in prisons.

The term 'gender violence' or 'gender-based violence' includes violence against women, but also takes cognizance of violence that both men and transgender face, as a consequences of their gender identities.

This paper uses the term gender violence to mean any form of violence – physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, economic, and psychological - that is directed at a person because of her/his gender. Given the constraints of time, the research has focused primarily on violence that women face. However, in this researcher's opinion, using the term 'gender violence' forces us to recognize this issue as one relevant to every individual, irrespective of gender.

2.1.2. Insecurity

A woman does not have to directly or repeatedly experience violence to feel insecure. The fear of violence perpetuates a state of insecurity; a feeling of insecurity undermines an individual's confidence, besides affecting her/his access to resources and overall quality of life. This paper argues that gender violence is a particularly insidious form of insecurity for women around the world and determines whether a girl goes to school, when a woman goes to work, whether and when she leaves her home to buy groceries and whether she uses public transport to travel around a city.

For the purposes of this paper, insecurity is therefore a feeling of anxiety and fear, an anticipation of violence, a palpable lack of a sense of security, whether in a specific physical space or because of a particular individual or community.

2.1.3. Research

Broadly, there are several stages of research including defining a problem, clarifying the scope of a study, sampling and data collection, data recording, data analysis and dissemination of findings.

The objective of this paper is to assess the state of research on gender violence. It is necessary to therefore clarify the relatively broad usage of this term for the purposes of this paper. To fully understand the several challenges related to researching gender violence, this paper takes a closer look at:

- academic or non-profit organizations that carry out stand-alone research projects;
- organizations that integrate research or action research as one component of their larger advocacy programme; and
- organizations that only gather data, and do not necessarily go on to data analysis.

The data collection stage continues to be a major stumbling block in researching gender violence and inevitably, much of the debate is centered on this point.

2.2. Researching Gender Violence

According to a 2006 United Nations report, at least one survey on violence against women had been conducted in 71 countries and at least one national survey was available in 41 countries (UN, 2006). Research organizations, universities and women's groups have initiated and published findings of numerous research projects on various aspects of violence: incidence and prevalence, causes and consequences of violence, gender violence as a public health issue, costs of violence, to name a few.

To begin with, there is never one single source of data on gender violence, but rather multiple sources, and countries often rely on a combination of several of these. Inevitably, conceptual understanding is uneven across these sources; how a nurse understands gender violence might be quite removed from how a policeman perceives it. Some common sources of data and methods of data collection include:

Population or household level surveys: The best documented advantage of this method of data collection is that it directly asks women of their experiences of violence and does not merely rely on reported cases. The argument that reported cases only constitute the tip of the iceberg is therefore made redundant. However, this is an expensive method of data collection and requires a large number of highly skilled interviewers. In recent years, questions on violence have been integrated into existing surveys; in India, select questions on women's experiences of violence have been included in the National Family Health Survey.

Service based data, from shelters, helplines and other support services: This is often the only form of data on gender violence in contexts where there is no funding for research. While this data is useful to analyze the help-seeking behaviour of women, and also to follow up on a case over a long period of time, there are several disadvantages. First, any data from support services will only constitute a very small percentage of the number of women who experience violence. Secondly, double counting is inevitable, since women invariably approach more than one organization when in distress. Moreover, staff at shelters may be trained social workers or counselors but are unlikely to be trained researchers.

Data from the health sector: Gender violence is increasingly recognized as a public health issue, with health care professionals often functioning as a first point of contact for those who have experienced violence. When women are injured, burnt, raped or assaulted, they require medical care; hospitals and clinics are therefore a legitimate source of data. However, there are both practical and ethical considerations that often impede this process. In the first instance, in every country in South Asia, training is grossly inadequate for health care workers who rarely possess the right skills, knowledge or attitudes to identify and respond to someone who has experienced violence. Again, the onus is on hospital administrators, in both the public and private sector, to establish and monitor a credible system that functions efficiently at multiple levels. Obtaining data from the private sector is inevitably

even harder. There is also the question of protecting a patient's privacy and the ethics of mandatory reporting.

Police records: In most South Asian countries, police records are the most regular and reliable source of information on gender violence. In India, for instance, the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) consolidates data on several forms of violence annually; occasionally, the NCRB also carries out comparative analysis and publishes crime clocks. It must be argued that in many ways, police records are the most authentic source of data on reported cases of VAW. Yet, there are several points of caution. Police records naturally only include reported cases and police officers are bound by the specific categories of laws that exist for a particular crime. There are also considerable overlaps, complicating the procedure. For instance, a case of domestic violence in India can be filed as a case of dowry harassment, if the couple has been married less than seven years; or could be classified as a case of cruelty. Given the lack of adequate training or gender sensitisation for the police on this issue, there is little uniformity of understanding across the country. Undercounting, double counting and miscounting are all definite possibilities.

Judicial sector: Data from the judicial sector is one of few ways to follow a reported case of violence to its legal conclusion. However, in many instances, lawyers and judges are wary of sharing data with research organizations; there are of course legal restraints. Without data sharing, assessing the implementation of a specific law becomes problematic.

Media reports: These are probably the most common source of data on gender violence but are even more limited in nature than previous sources. Media reports are often based on police records and represent the tip of the tip of the iceberg. Yet, in the absence of any official records, non-governmental organizations rely heavily on media reports to garner public support and advocate for policy change .

This challenge, of how we can effectively measure VAW and gender violence is not peculiar to the South Asian countries. In 2006, a UN resolution called on the UN Statistical division to 'develop a set of possible indicators on violence against women in order to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women' (UN, 2007). The rationale was this: standardized indicators could result in consistent data collection and systematic monitoring. This could potentially mean 'strengthening the knowledge base on violence against women', leading to policy and legislative reforms, and an improved strategy to eliminate VAW. Two main types of indicators on violence against women are being developed: indicators that measure the extent of the phenomenon; and indicators that measure a state's responses to the problem. Ideally, these indicators should also measure the severity of the violence and its short-term and long-term impact (Economic and Social Council, 2006).

Researching gender violence in a situation of conflict bears additional challenges, including the dangers of carrying out research in a conflict zone. Researchers need better training, access to emergency help and safety tips. Despite a call for accelerated research and documentation of women's experiences during conflict and war, 'GBV research among refugee, internally displaced (IDP), and post-conflict populations remains sparse and, when conducted, is often not disseminated beyond local communities' (Clark, 2003). In many instances, accessing refugee camps is the first critical hurdle; bypassing corrupt officials is often another barrier.

This paper cannot do justice to the ongoing debates on several related issues - the nature of the

indicators used to measure violence and specificities of carrying out interviews with women who've experienced violence (what is the best possible time and setting in which to conduct an interview, how do we ask women about perpetrators, etc). There is also a vast body of work on the ethics of researching violence; it is not the intention of this paper to enter into a discussion on the subject. Suffice to note that any rigorous, credible research project must have a sound ethical basis, and this is especially true when research questions address experiences of violence.

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration noted that without 'adequate gender-disaggregated data and statistics on the incidence of violence' designing and expanding programmes and monitoring changes was particularly difficult (United Nations, 1995). More specifically, the Beijing declaration (129) outlined specific actions to be taken by governments, regional organizations, the United Nations, other international organizations, research institutions, women's and youth organizations and non-governmental organizations including:

- the promotion of research, collection of data and compilation of statistics, particularly on domestic violence;
- supporting research measuring implementations; and
- improved dissemination of research findings.

There is no paucity of intellectual capacity to guide this discussion on researching gender violence; it is in implementing recommendations like the above that countries face frequent, persistent hurdles. Researching violence calls for committed, sustained efforts, backed by rigorous training, a strong consideration for ethics and sustained funding. For the South Asian countries, each of these factors has proven an obstinate barrier.

3. The State of Gender Violence in...

This chapter presents a short overview of the state of gender violence in each South Asian country.

3.1. Bangladesh

Women in Bangladesh are vulnerable to virtually every form of violence: rape, domestic and intimate partner violence, trafficking, sexual harassment at workplaces and in public spaces and acid attacks as well as Fatwa-related violence (UNIFEM, 2003).

There is no paucity of research on gender violence or VAW in Bangladesh. For the last two decades, research institutions and think tanks as well as NGOs and human rights organisations have documented, researched and analyzed incidents of VAW. For some, VAW has become one of the most 'visible and articulated social issues in Bangladesh' (Mollah, no date). For many others, breaking the silence on this issue remains a critical challenge.

Over the past 15 years, the growing body of research on violence against women has brought the issue from a position of near-invisibility to being recognized as having far-reaching health and economic impacts for women and societies. (Johnston & Naved, 2008)

Several NGOs have established monitoring systems to track levels of violence. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) monitors violence through its field level offices, identifying trends, and carrying out specific analysis, looking at male attitudes towards violence, for instance (M. Rafi,

personal communication 2010). Human rights organisations like Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) have also played a critical role in the documenting process, publishing annual reports on the state of violence, including gender violence and VAW. These are mostly based on media reports and police records (ASK, 2010).

Acid attacks have been a particularly prevalent forms of violence in Bangladesh, with young women the target in the majority of attacks. In 2002, a year when there were 490 reported incidents of acid attacks, Bangladesh introduced a tough law, with punishment including death penalty. Six years later, in 2008, the number of reported incidents had gone down to 179 (ASF, 2010). Mohd Rafi, Senior Research Fellow at BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division however observes that there has been little research to explain this. 'What explains the rise and fall in the incidence of these attacks? Unless this is determined, it'll be difficult to control this in the future' (Personal communication, 2010).

Bangladesh was one of the sites for WHO's Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. This revealed that 57.5% of women in the provinces of Bangladesh had experienced either sexual and physical violence, or both. Bangladesh was found to be among the countries with the highest levels of violence. More recently, the PRIP Trust assessed the 'Situation of Violence against Women (VAW) in Six Selected Districts under Dhaka Division.' The study concluded that women in these districts were most vulnerable to violence from their husbands; respondents also identified dowry-related violence as the severest problem. It recommended, among other things, the formation of specific VAW committees in every ward and increased dialogue with men on violence related issues (Khandker, 2009).

A baseline study on VAW in Bangladesh, compiled by two women's organisations Naripokkho and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad looked at six different forms of violence – family violence, acid attacks, rape and sexual violence, custodial violence, murder and suicide, community violence. This report brought together and consolidated data collected by different organisations, an essential exercise. However, given the multiplicity of sources, comparative data analysis was not really feasible, nor was it always possible to verify or augment the available data. This report identifies several critical gaps in law and law enforcement as well as inadequacies in availability of community and support services (Naripokkho & Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, no date).

Research organisations like International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR, B) and the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC have also been active on this issue. There has been significant research looking at the links between women's participation in micro credit programs, their overall productivity and their vulnerability to violence (Hadi, no date). Research has demonstrated that if a woman is deemed to be productive and contributing to the household, this lowers her vulnerability to marital violence. The rationale is that a two-income household reduces the stresses caused by poverty. However, other studies have shown that women's involvement in any income generation program or NGO activities has no real impact on reducing the risk of violence. 'When resources allocated to women with and without the experiences of domestic violence are compared, no statistically significant difference between the mean calories consumed by the two groups can be found' (Toufique & Razzaque, 2007).

In 2009, the Centre for Policy Dialogue carried out a cost analysis of domestic violence in Bangladesh, identifying and highlighting the extent of direct costs such as health care, displacement, legal services and social services (CPD, 2009). This study also analyzed, the 'help-seeking behaviour' of women who'd experienced violence: whom did they turn to for help? Did they seek help at all?

Despite this seeming abundance of research, several questions remain. Organizations that collect data themselves face several challenges: communities tend to be suspicious about what researchers may use the data for, and wary of sharing specific data such as names, locations, family relations etc. (M. Rafi, personal communication, 2010).

Johnston and Naved (2008) identify several areas where further research is required: what are the consequences of violence, for women, for their children, their families and communities? What is the nature and consequence of the relationship between intimate partner or spousal violence and suicide? What is the impact of preventive and curative interventions? They suggest that spousal violence be included in all existing public health surveillance systems, so as to improve data availability and enable the identification of trends of violence. They point out that without consistency in data collection, documenting trends and comparative analysis will be impossible. Others suggest that more research is needed on the incentives that have worked to discourage dowry, and the overall effectiveness of interventions (USAID, 2010). Another important area for research is deemed to be the role of women in perpetuating violence, specifically in regard to domestic and dowry-related violence. There are also concerns about the overall quality of research (M. Rafi, personal communication, 2010). The Multi-sectorial program on violence against women, initiated by the Ministry of Women and Childen Affairs has proposed a National Database on VAW, bringing together data and VAW statistics from law enforcement agencies, from Women Affair Offices at the district level, from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, newspaper reports on VAW and findings by NGOs (Hossain, no date). However, it does not appear that this database exists as yet.

3.2. Bhutan

The movement against gender violence is relatively young in Bhutan when compared to the other South Asian countries. Despite living in a society considered 'free of overt gender biases and inequalities in terms of legislation, policies and cultural traditions,' Bhutanese women experience gender violence, both within their homes and in public spaces. As in other countries, there is a perceptible culture of silence that persists among women and their families (NPAG, 2008).

Following the establishment of the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in 2004 and its subsequent elevation to an independent, autonomous body, several policy documents have drawn attention to the situation of VAW in the country. These documents, along with program reports published by the UN, are the only source of information on VAW in Bhutan.

The National Plan of Action for Gender (NPAG) for 2008-2013 confirms the lack of any reliable data on any form of VAW. The NPAG contends that 'no established system exists for systematic collection and analysis of VAW-related data, which would link various actors that play key roles in dealing with VAW.' The Thimphu division of the Royal Bhutan Police appears to be the only division that compiles data on VAW and violence against children. In 2005, 71 cases of domestic violence were reported in the capital city; 37 of these were subsequently withdrawn (NPAG, 2008).

The Common Country Programme Action Plan for 2008-2012 notes that violence against both women and children has increased in rural Thimphu between 2000 and 2005 and decreased in urban Thimphu in the same period. More positively, it observes that increased reporting by the media and the establishment of the Women and Child Protection Unit in Thimphu in early 2007 has helped in setting up a reporting mechanism on gender violence. With support from the UN Trust Fund, the Bhutanese government is working to improve the implementation of legislation related to VAW. This

includes establishing women-friendly procedures in the country within both the police and judicial systems. More specifically, the project aims to result in both 'increased reporting of cases of violence against women' and a 'strengthened information base on all forms of violence against women in Bhutan' (ZISVAW). A preliminary study carried out by NCWC and RENEW, a non-governmental organisation, sought to define the nature and forms of VAW in Bhutan and identify available support services and interventions. This study has revealed that:

- A Bhutanese woman experiences violence irrespective of whether she is single or married.
- 77 % of women have experienced physical abuse, 54 % emotional torment and 33 % forced sex.
- Most women said they had not reported instances of violence, fearing stigma or reprisals from perpetrators.

A glaring but unsurprising omission in these official documents on gender violence in Bhutan is the experiences of Bhutanese refugee women. Donini (2008) writes of the continuum of gender violence that this large community, the majority of whom reside in Nepal, is vulnerable to. She notes that gender violence began in peace time and refers to evidence that suggests state-sponsored or state-supported violence directed particularly at Southern Bhutanese women; their experience as refugees has further exacerbated this. Donini also observes that despite the large body of research on gender violence and conflict, Bhutanese refugees have received very little attention.

In the absence of any independent research on gender violence in Bhutan and given that there appears to be only one NGO working on the issue, verification of any data is near impossible. Research on gender violence in Bhutan is therefore virtually non-existent; ongoing projects acknowledge this lacuna and are focusing on strengthening data collection systems.

3.3. India

As early as in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Indian women's organizations had taken up the issue of gender violence, campaigning and supporting women who'd filed cases (Patel, 1998). Since then, as in Bangladesh, gender violence and VAW have remained on the agenda of NGOs, but have failed to occupy community mindsets.

The International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) has been a key player in carrying out research on gender violence in India. In the late 1990s, ICRW's initial consultative process revealed that there was no national prevalence data on domestic or intimate partner violence. ICRW commissioned eight studies around this issue, through the PROWID project, looking at primary survey data from Gujarat; hospital records from Maharashtra, records of Special Cell for Women and Children in Mumbai; NGO and court records in Bangalore; an assessment of responses to domestic violence services; and finally a multi-site population based survey of domestic violence. The findings of these studies contributed towards framing the act on domestic violence that was passed in 2005. ICRW has since also studied the association between domestic violence and women's ownership of property, looking to identify if property could act as a safety net. A key finding was that ownership of a house was more crucial to preventing violence than ownership of land (N. Bhatla, personal communication, 2010).

Women's groups and other organizations in states across India have undertaken research on and analysis of other aspects of gender violence. It is not possible to catalogue this list, but this body of

work includes the early work on gender and public spaces by the Mumbai-based Partners for Urban Research and Knowledge (PUKAR); a study to analyse the existence of redressal mechanisms for workplace sexual harassment in the city of Bangalore and most recently, a study assessing the quality of state run services in eleven districts in Karnataka, for women who have experienced violence, both by the Bangalore-based Hengasara Hakina Sangha (HHS). The findings of this recent study are being used to lobby for better, more periodic monitoring of these services by the government. In Kerala, the Sakhi Resource Centre's research on gender violence in the state has demonstrated that almost 40% of women have ever experienced any type of domestic violence during their lifetime (Sakhi, no date).

India has several laws on gender violence related issues, but legal research remains a nascent field (S. Thomas, personal communication, 2010). The exception is a long-term project of the Lawyers Collective following up on and assessing the impact and implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. On health and gender violence, the Center for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT) has pioneered work on integrating a response to VAW into the health sector. But with the exception of the ICRW series, there have been no other research projects on the same scale (R. Menon, personal communication, 2010).

Domestic violence was the first, and for the longest time, the only research priority, partly on account of the early emphasis, advocacy and lobbying for legislation by several of the women's groups. The focus appears to have shifted in recent times though to sexual harassment and women's safety in public spaces. In the last year, two major studies on women's safety in Delhi (considered a particularly unsafe city for women) have been carried out by Jagori and CEQUIN. The findings of both were similar. The CEQUIN study (2009) demonstrated that sexual harassment of women in public places was frequent, occurred at all times of the day and night, in both crowded and desolate spaces, that onlookers were unresponsive to calls for help; and that women were reluctant to seek help from the police.

Jagori's research included a baseline survey of over 5000 respondents in New Delhi over 23 areas in the city. Findings revealed that women in the 15-19 age group and women workers from unorganized sectors were especially vulnerable; that 2 in 3 women had experienced sexual harassment at least 2 to 5 times in the last year; that poor infrastructure including the quality of streetlights, pavements and public toilets were major reasons for lack of safety; and that women continued to bear the burden of keeping safe. These findings were triangulated by focus group discussions and safety audits in several parts of the city. Jagori has since shared not only the findings but also the research methodology and tools with other organizations in the country, a rare but welcome move to prevent any reinvention of the wheel.

In many ways, there is no lack of data on gender violence in India. The National Family Health Survey has begun to include questions on women's experiences of violence. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) gathers extensive data based on police records from around the country; this is available in the public domain. Even given that this only includes reported cases of violence, it is a good entry point for researchers. Ritu Menon points out that although there is a surfeit of data on gender violence, crucial correlates are missing. Without these, real analysis is difficult.

We know there is a lot of violence, but we don't know much else - which income group do these women belong to? Which social group? What is their individual and household profile? We have no context, except in the case of domestic violence. (R. Menon, personal communication, 2010)

To quote extensively from a report this researcher was involved in producing (Prajnya, 2009):

Across the board, there are three sets of problems with any statistics on any issue. The first set relates to the conceptual underpinnings of data collection. Do the categories into which information is plugged make sense? For instance, if there is no category for workplace sexual harassment cases, does it make sense to put them in under torture? The second set of problems arises from the nature of data collection. Each agency or organization is collecting data from their point of view: health, education, child rights, security, livelihoods and so on. The data reflect this priority and orientation. The problem is that the basis for collection might vary, the bases of classification might vary and therefore, the data may not be comparable. A final set follows from the scattered nature of reporting and data collection. Often the same numbers are repeated everywhere. This sometimes indicates accuracy and reliability, but the troubling aspect of this is that over time and repeated usage, we have a 'house built on a weak foundation,' or at least, a dubious one. This is not so much because the original numbers might be flawed, but because citations and sourcing have dropped off along the way.

Another major lacuna is in the evaluations of programs and interventions, critical given the diverse nature of the numerous organizations working on this issue. In the case of large projects, there is usually a monitoring and evaluation component built in but towards the end of the project (N. Bhatla, personal communication, 2010). Equally crucial is the sharing and dissemination of such evaluations.

There is more work to be done. Nandita Bhatla of ICRW (Personal communication, 2010) draws attention to several other gaps in research – how do women respond to the available services, are they satisfied? What is violence costing India, and the significance of the timing of specific acts of violence on a woman's life? Says Ritu Menon (Personal communication, 2010), 'all the significant analysis to date has revealed that violence is systemic – that is the major insight we have. Now we need to dismantle and understand this systemic nature.'

3.4. Maldives

The first ever in-depth study on gender violence appears to have been commissioned in 2004 by the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security. This study was largely qualitative in nature and intended as a pre-cursor to a more comprehensive quantitative study to be carried out in 2005. The study acknowledges that there is a dearth of research on gender violence in the Maldives, primarily because gender violence is still perceived as a private issue, to be settled within the family. Therefore VAW remains 'largely hidden and undocumented in Maldives' (Fulu, 2004).

In this study, the researchers adopted the case study approach, chronicling the stories of a select few who had experienced different forms of gender violence or as in the report, survivors of VAW. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out; the report includes three case studies – one each on sexual abuse, domestic violence and workplace harassment.

In 2006, the Ministry of Gender and Family released the findings of the Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences. This is the most widely cited (and most recent) research on gender violence in the Maldives. This quantitative study, based on the WHO Multi-Country study of Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women study, was a cross-sectional population-based household survey. 2582 households, 6% of all households in Maldives, were sampled across the country; only women between the ages of 15 and 49 were interviewed. The findings revealed the relatively widespread prevalence of gender violence:

- 1 in 3 women between the ages of 15 and 49 years reported some form of physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives.

- 1 in 5 women between the ages of 15 and 49 years reported physical or sexual violence by a partner.
- 1 in 9 reported experiencing severe violence.
- 1 in 6 women in Male and 1 in 8 countrywide reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse under the age of 15 years.
- Of those women between the ages of 15 and 49 years who had ever been pregnant, 6 % reported having been physically or sexually abused during pregnancy.

Despite this study, the US Department of State's 2009 Human Rights Report for Maldives (2010) refers to the absence of any 'firm data on the extent of violence against women.' A coalition of NGOs has also drawn attention to the lack of documentation of VAW, and the absence of adequate legal categories for counting crimes against women in the Maldives. Cases of rape, for instance, are considered under the 'sexual misconduct' category, since there is no mention of rape in the legal system.

While the Health and Life experiences study has irrefutably demonstrated the existence of gender violence in the Maldives, it is not clear whether there has been any follow-up nor is it evident if data collection and monitoring systems have been established throughout the country. One of the study's key recommendations is a call for more research, particularly on the design and implementation of interventions and their effectiveness; and for various sectors, including health, legal and support services to maintain, record and share data on gender violence (Fulu, 2007a).

It must be noted that with the dishonorable exceptions of rape, domestic and intimate partner violence, other forms of violence appear to less prevalent in the Maldives. As Faizal (2005) notes, Maldivian women are spared the ignominies of dowry and dowry-related deaths; trafficking is absent, despite a flourishing tourism industry; and girls are welcomed by families without any visible signs of male preference.

3.5. Nepal

Women in Nepal face several forms of violence; this is exacerbated by cultural practices that heighten women's vulnerability to violence including child marriage, polygamy and polyandry; the practices of Deuki, Badi and Jhuma practiced in Western Nepal, where girls are offered to temples and sexually exploited; and the Jari system, where a married woman can be bought by another man (Rana, no date).

An early study carried out by Saathi in 1995 revealed that 95 % of respondents (all women and girls) attested to first-hand experiences of VAW (UNIFEM, 2003). But since then, there appear to have been few nationwide surveys or research initiatives to assess the state of gender violence. It has been observed that documentation is scarce and that 'there have few research studies... specifically in the area of VAW' (UNIFEM, 2003).

However, several organizations are engaged in advocacy on gender violence and VAW, including Care Nepal, Maiti Nepal, Saathi, Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT) and FEDO, among others. In addition, international organizations do publish data on human rights violations including VAW. In 2007, 40 cases of sexual violence were reported to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (UN OHCHR, 2007).

Despite several government and civil society initiatives, including the establishment of district level task forces and an anti-trafficking Bill, trafficking remains a particular scourge. The vulnerability of women to violence has also been enhanced by the civil conflict; it is estimated that thousands of women have been raped, abused or killed by both Maoist groups and government security forces. There is little or no information on the violence faced by women in the more remote, inaccessible regions of the country (UNIFEM, 2003). In addition, Nepal hosts a large number of Bhutanese refugees who are at frequent risk of violence (see section on Bhutan).

The National Women Commission of Nepal, in its five year strategic plan, (2009-2014) clearly identifies establishing a 'mechanism for collecting data in all forms of violence against women during and after conflict (including sexual violence).' It also identifies reviewing and strengthening monitoring and investigation mechanisms for VAW as an area of strategic intervention, through the following activities:

- Developing guidelines / procedures for dealing with VAW cases.
- Support to initiate and replication of Para Legal committees and make effective ADR and community mediation systems.
- Developing innovative and pragmatic tools and mechanisms to monitor and investigate cases of VAW.
- Initiating and establishing documentation and system of evidence based data and information.
- Creating a monitoring team within NWC and equip it with necessary skills, knowledge, instruments and tools.

It must be acknowledged that this researcher has struggled to access information on gender violence in Nepal or interview organizations working on the issue. While there are publications, they are fewer than anticipated; and arriving at any conclusions has been a challenge. In addition, the majority of emails sent to over twenty different organizations in Nepal bounced back or received no response; phone numbers on websites do not work or have been changed; and it has therefore been very difficult to assess the state of research on gender violence in the country.

3.6. Pakistan

Patriarchy is entrenched in Pakistan, as in other countries in the region . Pakistan has consistently ranked low on indicators measuring the status of women, most recently at 132 of 134 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report for 2010. Women in Pakistan remain vulnerable to rape, trafficking across the porous, mountainous borders, honour killings or karo kari, acid attacks, forced and child marriages and domestic violence.

In 2006, the Gender Mainstreaming section of the Pakistan Government's Planning & Development Division (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006) published a comprehensive bibliography of all available gender data. This document primarily drew on national level censuses and large sample surveys, to assess the extent of 'missing data.' Tellingly, there was no data related to gender violence or VAW; the closest was a mention of the sex ratio but even this was not further disaggregated.

The ongoing Gender and Justice Project in Pakistan, supported by UNDP and DFID, focuses on VAW, among other issues. One of the objectives of the project is 'to create and support mechanism

to support a sustainable reduction in Violence Against Women (VAW) in Pakistan' (GJP, 2007). The project document highlights the importance of action research and documentation on VAW.

Data is a problem. When we were developing the log frame of the project, we really had problems on the baseline. What we had was the report of the Aurat Foundation. We don't have a broad baseline, this has a lot of limitations and only includes data which has been reported. The problem is that population lives in rural areas, and VAW is not reported there. (S. Ahmed, personal communication, 2010)

The GJP project eventually measured the incidence of VAW using data from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Aurat Foundation. The latter's annual review of statistics appears to be the most authentic source of data on gender violence in Pakistan. This national study is based on data collected by the Foundation's four offices in the provinces, as well as data from Islamabad. This data is largely drawn from media reports, police records and other sources (including hospitals, support services) and therefore is believed to be an underestimation. The most recent analysis has revealed a 13% increase in VAW between 2008 and 2009. In all, 8,548 incidents of violence against women were reported in the print media across Pakistan, an increase from 7571 cases reported in 2008. The report further disaggregates this number by the type and location of violence.

Key missing data elements are the age figures of victims and survivors in cases of VAW. The relationship between victim and offender and motives behind offences are also mostly missing in reported cases. Other limitations faced by the study teams arose out of the security situation in some districts of KP and Balochistan that made access to data on cases of VAW difficult and in some cases, impossible. (Aurat Foundation, 2010).

One of few explorations of masculinity in Pakistan, research by Rozan (no date) is revealing for its association with violence against women. This research was carried out in a small area in the city of Rawalpindi in Punjab, focusing on young men and women between the ages of 15 and 25. The study revealed that boys felt sexual helplessness and a sense of inadequacy when coming into contact with girls and women on the street; several boys believed that rape was consensual and could not take place if the woman wasn't willing; domestic violence was sometimes 'necessary' to show a woman 'her place'; and it was clearly the woman's responsibility to prevent violence within the home. On their part, for young women, intimate partner violence was occasionally justifiable and acceptable in certain situations.

One commonly cited reason for the lack of research is a lack of sustained funding. Both UNDP and UNIFEM point out that there is little funding for research on VAW; the majority of the funds are intended for implementation of programmes. Equally challenging is bringing together the various stakeholders.

How do you bring all ...stakeholders together - Pakistan census organization, federal bureau of statistics, all the gender cells, all the tiers? The coordination bodies don't coordinate among each other. Validation and reliability is a challenge. How would you rely on this? (Khan, personal communication, 2010)

Nevertheless, there are several urgent research priorities for the future: studying forced and early marriage and right to property (N. Hussain, personal communication, 2010); emotional and psychological violence and the impact on mental health of women (S. Ahmad, personal communication, 2010); the need to analyze the more indigenous forms of violence, beyond dowry and bride burning; assessing the language of violence; and building an inventory of challenges that does not merely duplicate those in international publications (R. Perveen, personal communication, 2010).

Pakistan has suffered several natural disasters in the last decade, including devastating earthquakes and floods. We know very little about how these disasters affected women and undoubtedly increased their vulnerability to violence. Across Pakistan, women and their children continue to live as internally displaced citizens in make-shift camps, with restricted access to resources and limitations on their freedom of movement. Although there is considerable anecdotal evidence, there appears to be virtually no quantitative or qualitative data on the experiences of women in these tragic circumstances. The same is true of the impact of conflict and internal strife on women.

Again, there has been little research to explore specific cultural practices, such as Swara, also known as Vanni in Punjab, where young girls are given away as compensation to settle a dispute. It is believed that there is a higher incidence of this tradition in the North West Frontier Province, but little data is available beyond anecdotal evidence.

Noting the absence of national data on VAW, a 2003 report (UNIFEM) stated that research on 'different aspects of VAW, the rehabilitation of survivors, the economic impact of VAW and VAW among internally displaced families' was 'practically non-existent.' Seven years later, despite the best efforts of several NGOs and others, little appears to have changed. Given the size and landscape of the country, it is clear that data collection must remain primarily the government's responsibility.

3.7. Sri Lanka

Of all the South Asian countries, Sri Lanka performs best on gender and human development indicators, with a high level of education and employment amongst women. Despite this, VAW continues to be widespread in Sri Lanka, with virtually every form of violence prevalent in the country (Jayasundere, 2009).

In addition, the long-drawn conflict has accelerated and accentuated the vulnerability of women to violence. Families have been displaced, with several living in refugee camps for years; camps have become a site of violence against women. Domestic violence among families living in camps is believed to be particularly high (Ganeshpanchan, 2005). Physical circumstances, such as cramped living spaces, limited toilets, the presence of several strangers, and no or little security also renders women vulnerable to violence. There have also been sporadic reports of state-sponsored violence, and violence endorsed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam.

There has been a proliferation of projects (many with research components) on gender violence and VAW in Sri Lanka, largely on account of the presence of an unusually large number of active women's groups. Equally unusually, gender projects have enjoyed sustained financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency, through the Shakti Gender Equity Project, and now through the Women Defining Peace Project.

In 2004, the Centre for Women's Research carried out a study on Sexual and Gender Based Violence in the country, surveying 12 locations, all areas either directly affected by the armed conflict or immediately surrounding them, analyzing data from hospital records, police stations and welfare centres. This study pointed out the disparity in the documentation and recording process, often making data comparison very difficult. How data was recorded depended on the individual police officer's level of knowledge: 'relevant authorities either do not have the capacity or the awareness/expertise and resources to collect and maintain the relevant data systematically' (Wijayatilaka, 2004).

Research has also demonstrated that domestic violence and rape are prevalent in rural Sri Lanka (Hussein, 2000); that women faced considerable violence after the devastating 2004 Tsunami, from both strangers and their partners; and that they had also faced frequent violence before the tsunami

that had never been recorded (CATAW, 2007; De Mel, 2006); and that there are several unresolved issues in relation to prohibition and/or legalisation of sex work that directly affect the violence that sex workers face (Miller, 2000).

In 2005, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was passed in the country. As in India, organizations have focused their campaigning and advocacy efforts on improving awareness of this law. 'There has been a big research push to look at domestic violence, because its easier in many ways, and the biggest service provider works on the issue' (R. Jayasundere, personal communication, 2010). There are at least two ongoing research projects focusing on island-wide mapping of domestic violence services and seeking to assess the impact and implementation of the law – where have cases been filed from? Who is filing them? Do women file cases directly or do they do so only through NGOs? (C. Kodikara, personal communication, 2010).

Women in Need (WIN), the major service provider in the country has analysed 37 cases filed under this Act to assess 'if there are deficiencies in the law itself, and if so how the legal regime can be strengthened to achieve its objectives' (Women in Need, 2009). Their findings highlighted the need for a multi-partner engagement with the issue, with a clear role for the judiciary, the police, counsellors (who continue to be underused) as well as organisations like WIN.

The first ever National Report on Violence and Health in Sri Lanka was published in 2008. This document drew attention to the impact of violence on health and the urgent need for a multi-sectoral response to all forms of violence. The authors acknowledged the limitations in availability of data on any form of violence, pointing out that 'it is difficult to obtain information related to violence from any single organization in Sri Lanka. . . There is no formal surveillance system related to violence in general or specifically for any particular type of violence in Sri Lanka' (WHO, 2008).

Researchers point to several gaps in research on gender violence including the need to study the links between poverty and violence, often cited as cause and effect without proper research backing (R. Jayasundere, 2009); to understand how people in turn understand and constructs concepts and issues of violence (C. Kodikara, personal communication, 2010); the vulnerability of female migrants and the wives of male migrants to violence (S. Thiruchandran, personal communication, 2010); incest and teenage pregnancies, for both of which there is considerable anecdotal evidence but little more (S. Thiruchandran; S. Kotegoda, personal communication, 2010); violence specifically directed at Muslim women (S. Sivagurunathan, personal communication, 2010); and research on primary prevention.

In addition, Kotegoda observes that there has been little follow-up on the sexual harassment act. 'There is no clear understanding on what harassment is or the range of harassment. We always go for bigger things. This is something that affects us everyday, we cannot get into a bus without being harassed. But we don't pull the law out and push it people's faces, telling them here, this is how you use it' (Personal communication, 2010).

On the face of it, it appears that Sri Lankan organisations have a vast research portfolio on VAW, but there are challenges. Researchers reiterate that the cultural reluctance to talk about violence remains deeply embedded. 'We need to look more closely at what we have achieved, if the cultural context has not changed in two decades' (C. Kodikara, personal communication, 2010). 'Despite the inadequacies, reports show a consistent rise in the levels of violence against women in Sri Lanka; be it due to increased awareness and thus increased reporting or due to an increase in incidences themselves, it is not clear'. (Jayasundere, 2009)

Most perturbing, organisations appear to be unwilling to share their research processes, challenges and findings with one another (with exceptions, of course). 'For instance, information on conflict and violence is scattered with many different groups. But no one is willing to share. As a result, we only have anecdotal evidence,' says Kodikara. It is unclear whether this is influenced by a sense of competition for funding and resource support. Says Sepali Kotegoda (Personal communication, 2010), 'what would be very difficult to do, and must be time-bound, is to take a look at twenty organisations and their work, assessing their programmes and research critically.'

4. Key Findings and Concluding Reflections

This final chapter summarizes the key findings, drawing on the specific country sections in the previous chapter and presents some reflections on the state of research on gender violence in South Asia.

Is there sustained, consistent research on gender violence in South Asia? Who commissions and carries out this research?

Yes, there are a considerable number of research initiatives in the region. Civil society groups, NGOs, research institutions and academia have undertaken research on several different aspects of gender violence and violence against women. However, there have been no real attempts at bringing together the findings of these scattered initiatives. As a result, we know many different things, but we do not have real big picture analysis. This is more true in the case of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan where there has been more research. Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan appear to have had far fewer research initiatives (even relative to the size of the nation and intensity of the problem). Understanding the state of gender violence in any given country for a given period is therefore near impossible.

Therefore, while it can be said that there is consistent research (in that there are always ongoing research projects), it cannot be stated that this research is sustained. Most projects are of a short duration and few organizations have the resources to undertake regular research or follow up on earlier studies.

What is the state of data collection on gender violence?

Many governments in the region collect data on several forms of gender violence, but these are bound by the legal categories that exist. In India, for instance, there is no legal, separate category for honour killings and therefore there is no all-India level data. Most incidents are classified as caste crimes or murders, and extrapolating from these is near-impossible. Moreover, while this data does exist, there are few attempts at systematic dissemination or even analysis. Researchers also point to the difficulties in sourcing data from government departments.

What does this research focus on?

The impact and consequences of gender violence is well documented, particularly in the case of physical and sexual violence. Overall, the majority of research has focused on domestic violence, particularly in Sri Lanka and India. This is no doubt linked to the passing of related acts in both countries in 2005. In the early years of the crusade against violence, domestic violence was conflated with gender violence. But we now know that we also need to focus research energies on other forms of violence; a slow shift towards studying sexual harassment in public places is evident.

What are the major research gaps?

We know very little about whether interventions have worked and if so, why or why not. There has been little systematic program evaluation or attempt at explaining trends: there are fewer acid attacks in Bangladesh than there were five years ago. Is this merely on account of a tough law or are there other explanations? Without understanding the reasons for trends, we cannot find ways to prevent violence; prevention strategies are the other major research lacuna. There have been few attempts to measure the perceptions and attitudes of both men and women towards violence; nor has research focused on trying to understand indigenous and traditional forms of gender violence. Most relevant to this paper, research has rarely posited gender violence as a question of security.

Is there financial support and adequate funding for research on gender violence in South Asia?

Funding for research has inevitably formed only one component of an overall project, with few stand alone research initiatives receiving funding in the region. There are exceptions of course – ICRW’s project on domestic violence and the WHO-led studies, to name a couple. Several researchers interviewed for this research have asserted that funding organisations tend to prefer funding what is perceived as most critical to the country, even if it is not always the most prevalent form of violence.

Within countries, funding is also disproportionate. In India, organizations outside of the capital of New Delhi draw attention to their comparatively greater difficulties in obtaining funding for research. The presumption is that most national level research must and needs to be initiated from New Delhi.

Reflections and recommendations

For those of us working on the issue of gender violence, some frequently asked questions are: is violence against women going up or has it reduced? Has there been more violence in recent years? Is gender violence more in city X than it is in city Y? Most often, the honest answer to these questions is: there is really no way to tell, accurately and definitively.

This final section briefly discusses four key issues on researching gender violence in South Asia.

1. Underreporting remains a major stumbling block in every country, and on every form of violence. However, it is evident that we cannot wait for attitudes towards gender violence to change before we commence high quality data collection and analysis. We must work with the data that we have and continue to make the assumptions we already do: that what we know is the tip of the tip of the iceberg.

2. Yes, there are several forms of violence that demand and deserve more research attention. But is more and more research really the answer? As has been pointed out, there is an enormous body of existing research on gender violence and VAW. In many instances, organizations remain unaware of each other’s work.

This researcher would like to highlight two missing links in the chain: first, a lack of proper dissemination and ineffective communication of these research findings as well as unwillingness to share experiences. More transparent research processes and updated websites can make a world of difference to the quality of research on gender violence.

In many instances, research is followed by inaction on the recommendations and findings. Yes, concerted action requires several willing partners, but very often, NGOs run out of energy and resources by the time the research is complete. The final step, using the research to push for policy change is often missing, despite evidence that has demonstrated the potential impact of this.

3. Given the dearth of both financial and human resources, the best intentioned civil society orga-

nization or research institute cannot sustain documentation or data collection. On paper, this is the government's responsibility. 'Governments should ensure that statistics on violence against women, including on prosecution and conviction rates, are regularly collected and disseminated and that interventions to address violence are properly evaluate' (WHO, 2005). But in practice, efficient, comprehensive systems that gather this kind of data do not exist. It is then up to governments to step up to the task, conceptualize and put in place, with the help of experts from civil society, data collection mechanisms, by both using existing frameworks and creating new ones. It is imperative that we look beyond crime and law and order to include data from other sources, particularly in the health sector.

Ideally, each country would have a central data base, with publicly accessible data that researchers could use for analysis. Without transparent data collection and storage, we cannot prevent duplication. There is one point of caution: NGOs must continue data collection as well, on smaller scales, for verification purposes.

4. Who will fund, on a sustained basis, data collection and research on gender violence? With commendable exceptions in some countries, funding support has tended to be limited. All the more reason, then, for governments to take responsibility at least for extensive data collection, at the scale and depth of detail that this issue of gender violence deserves. At present, the level of funding does not reflect the scale of the problem.

We have all heard stories of women who have experienced violence. These stories constitute the disproportionate body of anecdotal evidence that we often draw on, in our advocacy efforts. No doubt, stories lend a sense of 'lived experience' to a reader or listener but it is time we supplement these with other kinds of data that also tell a story. We can do this only through rigorous, transparent, sustained and consistent research on gender violence. One thing is clear: research on gender violence and violence against women can, has and does save lives.

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